Signs of Safety

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Signs of Safety

What is it?

A different approach in child protection work with children and families

Where did it come from?

- Originated in Western Australia by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards during work with Aboriginal Communities in the early 1990's.
  - Resources on Signs of Safety
    - Book - Signs of Safety by Turnell & Edwards
    - Book - Denied Abuse by Turnell & Essex
    - Website – www.signsofsafety.net

Signs of Safety Around the World

- Who is using the Signs of Safety framework?

  *Japan

  *Canada

  *United Kingdom

  *Sweden

  *Finland

  *New Zealand

  *The Netherlands

  *Australia

Signs of Safety in Minnesota

- Olmstead County
  - Lead the movement. Started their work in the early 1990's
- Carver County
  - Worked with Andrew Turnell over the past 5 years.
- Scott County
  - Over the past 1 ½ years
- Other counties at using the framework include:
  - Wright
  - Anoka
  - Hennepin
  - Stearns
  - St. Louis

  *there are many other counties that are in the early states of learning and implementing this framework.

Signs of Safety
3 Key Questions

1. What are we worried about?
(Harm and Danger statements)

2. What is going well?
(Search for strengths, best hopes)

3. What needs to happen?
(Next steps, safety plan)

Signs of Safety Framework
4 Key Elements

I. **Focus is on child safety**

II. **Partnership with Parents**

III. **Identifying strengths that lead to safety**
   (A list of services do not keep kids safe)

IV. **Safety planning and development of Safety Networks**
   ("It takes a village to raise a child")

Element I: Focus on Child Safety

What does safety mean?

- Safety is defined as strengths demonstrated as protection over time.

Clearly identifying and defining harm and danger:

Harm Statement - 2 components:
- What has happened to the child, and
- The impact it had on the child

Danger Statement -2 key issues:
- Needs to capture the seriousness of the issue (i.e. what are we worried about)
- Needs to be something a safety network can sign off on and be invested in

*Danger statements must be simple so the youngest person in the family can understand and in the family's language as it serves as the framework for effective safety planning.

Element II: Building Partnerships

What does research tell us about the importance of building relationships? It says:

The best predictor of positive outcomes for children in child protection cases is relationships.

- Relationship between the worker and other professionals (foster parents, therapists, etc) and the family.
- Relationships between professionals.
- Child safety is compromised when the various professionals are not "on the same page"

Element II: Building Partnerships

Practice Principles:

1. Respect service recipients as people worth doing business with.
2. Cooperate with the person, not the abuse
3. Recognize that cooperation is possible even when coercion is required (involuntary services)
4. All families have signs of safety - your job and ours will be to work with parents and ask questions to find their strengths.
5. Maintain the focus on child safety
6. Learn what parents want, what their best hopes are
7. Search for detail
8. Focus on small change AND compliment the change
9. Don't confuse details with judgments
10. Offer choices
11. Treat each contact with a parent as an opportunity for change

Element III: Identifying Strengths that Lead to Safety

Strength-Based, Family Centered Language

- Focuses on what is strong; not just on what is wrong
- Encourages families to do their personal best within the framework of their own culture
- Reframes deficits as opportunities for growth
- Acknowledges and builds on successes
- Presumes a desire for and the possibility of a positive outcome
- Holds the belief that families can and do change, with support and resources
- Includes feelings and words that match
- Models empathy and offers support

"If you were in the system, which of these would you hope your SW/system was committed to practicing"?

Element III: Identifying Strengths that Lead to Safety

- **Appreciative Inquiry** – a unique form of questioning to help workers and families recognize the good work they have done, a powerful tool to create a strengths based culture in a family or agency

- **<u>EARS Process</u>**
  - **<u>E</u>**licit – initial question is open ended to get the ball rolling with a purpose/context
  - **<u>A</u>**mplify – dig into it to get underneath it – how? who? what? When? etc.
  - **<u>R</u>**eflect – helping them reflect on the work they have done, ? about their meaning, scaling questions
  - **<u>S</u>**tart over – go back to another elicit question

Element IV: Safety Planning and Safety Networks

Key Elements of Effective Safety Planning:

- Openness with everyone including children about the harm and danger.

- Involves an extensive, informed friend and family network to plan for and achieve child safety (" It takes a village to raise a child".)
  *Developing a safety network is where you may come in

- Together create a specific, in the home, in the car, at-the-park, every day plan that <u>demonstrates</u> a child will be safe.

- The safety plan should incorporate rules for "triggers/stressors"

- A safety plan is a journey, created in relationship and demonstrated over time.

Element IV: Safety Planning and Safety Networks

Safety Networks:

- A good network has 8-10 members, working together to assure child safety

- The network is important in maintain child safety and quicken the departure of Social Services from the family's life. The goal is that the network will continue to be responsible for child safety and well-being long after Social Services closes ("It takes a village to raise a child").

Element IV: Safety Planning and Safety Networks

**<u>Safety Network Expectations</u>**

Would you be willing to:

- Be briefed regarding the concerns of the parents and Social Services?

- Check in on the parents and children 1-3 times per week (maybe less, maybe more) to assure that a child is safe?

- Attend occasional meetings with Social Services to determine the effectiveness of the safety network/safety plan?

- Search for and share strengths that lead to safety?

- Respond quickly, if a child is in danger?

Signs of Safety Tools

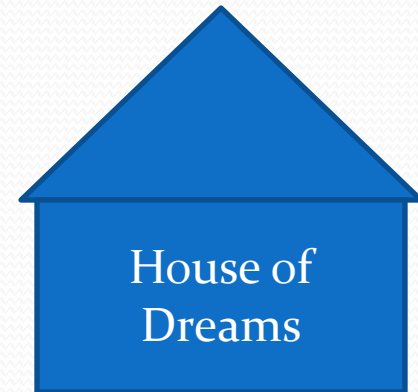**Ways to solicit a child's voice and give them their own story:**

Three Houses
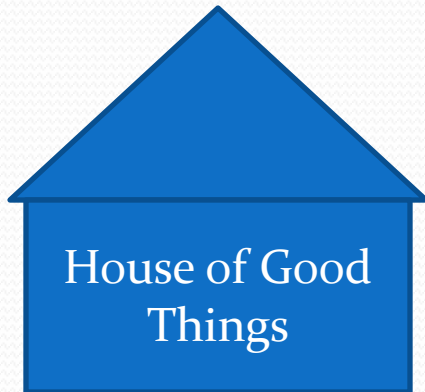
House of Good Things	House of Worries	House of Dreams
(What is going well)	**(What are you worried about)**	**(What is your best hope)**

Signs of Safety Tools

- Three Houses Example - 11 Year Old Boy

Good things	Worries
•Football •Homework •School •Visits with my mom •"Good Jobs" from parents •Boy Scouts with Dad •Rollerblading •Computer	•Step-mom being mean more often •Not paying attention to me •Always yelling at me

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Three Houses Example – 11 Year Old Boy Continued

<u>Wishes</u>

- Dad & step-mom could recognize my "good things" & not yell at me for getting an 82 instead of an 85 (got upset for getting yelled at)
- Dad not on computer so much – more time for he and younger brother to play with Dad
- Wishes younger brother wouldn't be such a know it all sometimes
- Would like to see mom live closer & visit grandma/mom more often – would like to see mom during the week if it was possible (it was)
- Would like to go to Camp Nickelodeon with family ($26 per wristband)
- Wishes they had hot water – says he hasn't has it for a month (family behind on gas bill, but have internet/cable – "why do we still have these?")

Signs of Safety Tools

- Wizards and Fairies

Signs of Safety Tools

Words and Pictures:

Gives everyone working with the child, including the parent, foster parent and social worker common language to use when talking to the child about the concerns.

- It is a story of the child's life, both the good things as well as the concerns, written in the family's language while still expressing the seriousness of the issue.

- The end product is a book that is given to the child, child's parents and network participants, which becomes a resource for how to talk with a child about concerns.

- It gives a child something to hang on to and helps them to develop a clear understanding of what is going on around them.

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Words and Pictures

Benefits for the child:

- Better understanding of why they went into placement.
- The child then doesn't have to make up their own story about why they are in placement.

Benefits for the parent:

- Helps them understand the concerns from social services in developing a shared story to give to their child.
- Allows them to see the strengths as well as the concerns.
- Language they can use in sharing with family the reason for social services involvement or reason for placement

Signs of Safety Tools

Words and Pictures

Benefits for the worker:
- A tool that allows you to partner with the family to develop strengths and to come up with common language regarding the concerns.
- Relieves pressure in trying to find ways to talk with the child about permanency (if applicable).

Benefits for the foster parent:
- Allows them to see the strengths of the family and can use some of the positives in the story to build their relationship with the child and family.
- Gives them a clear picture of the reason for child's placement and is a tool they can use when the child has questions.

Roles for Foster Parents

- **Foster Parent with child placed in your home**
  - Developing relationship with bio-family through ongoing contact
  - Supervising Visits
  - Co-parenting the child with the bio-parents

- **Mentor**
  - Child
  - Parent/family

- **Safety Network Participant**
  - Safety Plan
  - Community Liaison/resource

Panel Discussion – Old Way Vs. New Way

The "Old" Way

- Belief that CHIPS equals child safety
- Kids are only safe if in placement or sent home with CHIPS order
- Worker was expected to be the expert deciding what services would "fix" the problems in the family
- Families felt forced or coerced to "do services"
- Responsibility for child safety was on the worker
- Anxiety – Stress – Burnout!

The "New" Way

- Services and CHIPS do not equal safety but are sometimes necessary
- Kids are safe in their own homes with safety networks
- Family members are the experts on coming up with solutions to the problems in their family
- Family members are given choices regarding how they will proceed to establish child safety
- Responsibility for child safety is on the family
- Anxiety is reduced – building HOPE is ENERGIZING!